Two Washingtons: Information Asymmetry and the American Founding Mythology

How Elite Consciousness and Popular Narrative Construct Different Realities About the Same Man

An Analysis of George Washington's Private Correspondence Versus Public Mythology

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Abstract

George Washington exists in two completely different realities depending on whether one has access to elite sources or receives popular narratives. In the elite world—preserved in private correspondence, land speculation records, and strategic political communications—Washington appears as a calculating land speculator who coordinated secret violations of British law, accumulated massive wealth through western land grabs, owned hundreds of enslaved people, and led a rebellion against the lawful government he had sworn to serve. In the popular world—constructed through Parson Weems' hagiographies, taught in school textbooks, celebrated on monuments and currency, and embedded in American civic religion—Washington appears as a virtuous, honest, selfless hero who "cannot tell a lie," who reluctantly accepted leadership, who fought for noble principles of liberty and justice, and who was chosen by Providence to found the nation.

This paper argues that this bifurcation is not accidental confusion or incomplete historical knowledge but **functional information asymmetry essential to elite power**. The American Revolution was fundamentally a rebellion by English colonial elites (Creole elites) against their metropolitan overlords to protect material interests—land speculation beyond the Proclamation Line, smuggling operations threatened by British enforcement, and local political autonomy from imperial oversight. These elites could not tell common people "we are rebelling to protect our illegal land grabs and smuggling operations" because commoners might conclude they could similarly rebel against elite-imposed laws when convenient. Instead, elites framed the revolution in terms of universal principles—liberty, natural rights, resistance to tyranny—that mobilized common people to fight and die for elite material interests while believing they fought for freedom.

George Washington serves as paradigmatic case because his private correspondence (particularly the 1767 letter to William Crawford) explicitly documents elite consciousness about land speculation, legal violations, and strategic calculation, while the mythology constructed around him after the Revolution presents the opposite—a man of such virtue he literally cannot lie. The contrast reveals **the two worlds**: elites who talk plainly among themselves about material interests and strategic coordination, and commoners who are provided with legitimating narratives about virtue, principles, and divine favor.

Drawing on Washington's private letters (particularly the Washington-Crawford correspondence on western land speculation), British colonial policy documents (Proclamation of 1763), founding-era elite correspondence revealing material motivations, and the constructed public mythology (Parson Weems, eulogies, monuments, textbooks), this paper demonstrates that information asymmetry operates through creating parallel realities—elite sources reveal mechanisms while popular sources mystify them. Understanding this asymmetry is essential for recognizing how elite power functions through narrative construction, how revolutionary rhetoric serves elite interests while appearing to serve universal principles, and how educational systems perpetuate asymmetry by teaching mythology while concealing mechanisms.

Keywords: Information asymmetry, George Washington, American Revolution, land speculation, Proclamation of 1763, founding mythology, Parson Weems, elite consciousness, legitimating narratives, Creole elites, popular education

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I. Introduction: The Two Worlds

The Elite World: Washington to William Crawford, September 21, 1767

George Washington sat in his Mount Vernon study and composed a letter to William Crawford, his agent on the western frontier. The letter was marked private and confidential. What Washington wrote reveals a world most Americans have never encountered:

"I can never look upon that Proclamation in any other light (but this I say between ourselves) than as a temporary expedient to quiet the Minds of the Indians and [one] which must fall of course in a few years especially when those Indians are consenting to our Occupying the Lands. **Any person therefore who neglects the present opportunity of hunting out good Lands** and in some measure **Marking and distinguishing them for their own** (in order to keep others from settling them) will never regain it..."

He continued with explicit instructions for illegal activity:

"**If you will be at the trouble of seeking out the Lands I will take upon me the part of securing them** so soon as there is a possibility of doing it and will moreover be at all the Cost and charges surveying and patenting the same... **By this time it will be easy for you to**

discover that my Plan is to secure a good deal of Land.... All this is to be performed in the most private manner for reasons which will readily occur to you..."

The reasons that "will readily occur" to Crawford (and to any reader who understands how power works) are:

1. **The Proclamation of 1763 explicitly forbids settlement west of the Appalachians**
2. **Washington is plotting to violate this law secretly**
3. **He wants Crawford to use fake names or proxies to hide Washington's involvement**
4. **He's coordinating illegal land speculation while serving as a Virginia legislator sworn to uphold British law**
5. **He's gambling that the Proclamation will eventually be unenforceable and those who grab land first will be able to claim it later**

This is **elite consciousness**: Washington talks plainly about breaking the law, gaming the system, hiding his involvement, and securing land through coordinated deception. He assumes Crawford understands this is how wealth is accumulated—not through virtue or hard work, but through strategic violations of laws designed to protect indigenous peoples and regulate colonial expansion.

The Popular World: Parson Weems' "Life of Washington," 1800

Twenty-three years after Washington's death, Mason Locke Weems published *The Life of Washington*, which became the most influential biography in American history. In it, Weems created the founding mythology that Americans learn to this day:

The Cherry Tree Story:

"When George was about six years old, he was made the wealthy master of a hatchet of which, like most little boys, he was extremely fond. One day, in the garden, where he often amused himself by hacking his mother's pea-sticks, he found a beautiful young English cherry tree, of which his father was most proud. He tried the edge of his hatchet on the trunk of the tree and barked it so that it died.

The next morning, his father discovered what had been done to his favorite tree. He came into the house in considerable anger and demanded to know who the mischievous person was who had cut away the bark. Nobody could tell him anything about it.

Presently George came in, and his father asked him if he knew anything about it.

'I cannot tell a lie, father, you know I cannot tell a lie! I did cut it with my little hatchet.'

The anger died out of his father's face, and taking the boy tenderly in his arms, he said, 'My son, that you should not be afraid to tell the truth is more to me than a thousand trees! Yes, though they were blossomed with silver and had leaves of the purest gold!'"

This story is **completely fabricated**. Weems invented it. But it became the foundational narrative about Washington's character—he was so virtuous, so honest, so constitutionally incapable of deception that even as a child he would confess wrongdoing despite consequences.

Weems on Washington's Character:

"Never did nature and fortune combine more perfectly to make a man great... His form was noble—his muscles firm—his chest broad... But what was infinitely more lovely in Washington, infinitely dearer to the benevolent heart, was that native bravery, that sense of independence, which raises a man above all meanness... 'Tis George,' cried the mother, in a transport of joy. 'Tis George! Tis my son, the comfort of my age! I knew he would come, for George is a good boy, he loves his mother, and would die a thousand deaths before he would do anything that could bring shame on the name of a Washington!"

This is **popular mythology**: Washington presented as almost superhuman in virtue, chosen by nature and fortune, constitutionally noble, incapable of anything shameful. The reader is meant to revere, not analyze. To worship, not question.

The Asymmetry

These are descriptions of the same man:

Elite sources: Calculating land speculator coordinating secret violations of British law, accumulating wealth through strategic deception, operating with complete moral flexibility when material interests are at stake

Popular sources: Virtuous hero who "cannot tell a lie," chosen by Providence, selflessly serving nation, embodying moral perfection

The question this raises: How can the same person be presented in such radically opposite ways?

The conventional answer: Historical understanding evolved. Early hagiographers like Weems didn't have access to private correspondence and idealized their subject. Modern historians have fuller picture.

This paper's argument: The difference is not incomplete knowledge becoming complete, but **functional information asymmetry operating as designed**. Elites (like Crawford, other Virginia speculators, revolutionary leaders) needed to understand Washington as strategic operator coordinating material interests. Commoners needed to believe Washington was virtuous hero fighting for principles. Both understandings served elite interests, but at different levels:

- Elite understanding enabled coordination (Crawford knew to use proxies, keep quiet, grab land)

- Popular understanding enabled mobilization (commoners fought and died believing they served liberty, not Washington's land speculation)

The asymmetry persists today: Most Americans still learn the Weems mythology (perhaps slightly moderated) through textbooks, monuments, and civic education. Washington's actual private correspondence revealing land speculation, legal violations, and strategic calculation remains largely unknown to general public.

The Structure of This Analysis

This paper demonstrates information asymmetry through systematic comparison of elite sources (revealing mechanisms) with popular sources (mystifying mechanisms):

Section II examines the elite world—Washington's actual private correspondence, particularly regarding land speculation, showing how elites talk plainly among themselves about material interests and strategic coordination.

Section III examines the popular world—the constructed mythology from Parson Weems through modern textbooks, showing how commoners are provided with legitimating narratives about virtue and principles.

Section IV analyzes the American Revolution as elite rebellion protecting material interests (land speculation, smuggling, political autonomy) that required framing in universal principles to mobilize common support.

Section V demonstrates how the bifurcation serves elite interests—why elites needed commoners to believe the mythology while elites understood the material reality.

Section VI traces how educational systems perpetuate the asymmetry, teaching mythology while concealing mechanisms, maintaining different worlds for elites and commoners.

Section VII concludes by examining contemporary implications—how the same asymmetry operates today through parallel elite and popular narratives.

II. The Elite World: What Washington Actually Wrote

The Material Context: The Proclamation of 1763

To understand Washington's 1767 letter, we must understand what he was plotting to violate.

The Royal Proclamation of October 7, 1763 was issued by King George III following Britain's victory in the Seven Years' War (French and Indian War). The Proclamation established several

policies for administering newly-acquired territories, but the provision that enraged colonial elites was **the Proclamation Line**:

"And whereas it is just and reasonable, and essential to our Interest, and the Security of our Colonies, that the several Nations or Tribes of Indians with whom We are connected, and who live under our Protection, should not be molested or disturbed in the Possession of such Parts of Our Dominions and Territories as, not having been ceded to or purchased by Us, are reserved to them... **And We do hereby strictly forbid, on Pain of our Displeasure, all our loving Subjects from making any Purchases or Settlements whatever, or taking Possession of any of the Lands above reserved, without our especial leave and Licence for that Purpose first obtained.**"

The Proclamation Line ran along the crest of the Appalachian Mountains, forbidding settlement west of the line without royal permission. The stated purposes were:

1. **Preventing conflict with Native Americans** (Pontiac's War had just occurred, killing thousands)
2. **Regulating westward expansion** in orderly fashion under royal control
3. **Protecting indigenous land rights** through required treaties and purchases
4. **Maintaining imperial control** over colonial settlement patterns

For colonial elites, the Proclamation was catastrophic:

Many had already secured land grants or made speculative claims in the Ohio Country (modern Ohio, Kentucky, West Virginia, western Pennsylvania). The Proclamation invalidated these claims or made them unenforceable. Future wealth accumulation through western land speculation—the primary mechanism for enriching colonial elites—was blocked by royal decree.

The elite response was fury and coordination to evade the Proclamation. Washington's 1767 letter to Crawford is one documented example of systematic elite planning to violate the Proclamation through coordinated deception.

Washington's Land Speculation Empire

Washington was not casual land speculator—he was systematic accumulator operating multiple schemes simultaneously:

Mississippi Land Company (1763): Washington was founding member of company seeking 2.5 million acres in the Ohio Country. The Proclamation blocked this.

Virginia Regiment veterans' land bounties (1754-1763): Washington had served in Virginia Regiment during French and Indian War. Virginia promised veterans land grants in the west. Washington acquired claims from other veterans (buying them cheaply), consolidating claims that would eventually total over 30,000 acres. The Proclamation made these claims unenforceable unless the line was moved or violated.

Direct purchases and surveys (ongoing): Washington continuously sought opportunities to acquire western lands through various legal and extralegal means.

The Crawford arrangement (1767-1775): Washington's systematic plan to have Crawford secretly identify, survey, and claim valuable western lands using proxies to hide Washington's involvement until the Proclamation could be evaded or overturned.

By 1799 (his death), Washington owned approximately 52,000 acres in the Ohio Country and western Virginia, plus 8,000 acres at Mount Vernon, plus scattered holdings elsewhere. This massive land empire was accumulated largely through the schemes he coordinated in private correspondence while publicly serving in Virginia legislature and later as Continental Army commander and President.

The Private Correspondence: Elite Consciousness Revealed

Washington to William Crawford, September 21, 1767 (full relevant portions):

"Dear Sir:

I have lately received a letter from my friend Colonel George Mercer, on the subject of the Officers and Soldiers of the Virginia Regiment land, which induces me to write to you on that subject.

The letter is a long one, and would be tedious to copy... The substance of it is that Colonel George Mercer has been informed that there is a probability of getting the Lands on the Ohio, which we are promised by the Proclamation... and as no doubt can remain of the reality of the Proclamation, he recommends to the Officers to be expeditious in taking up the Lands, as the delay may be attended with bad consequences.

I can never look upon that Proclamation in any other light (but this I say between ourselves) than as a temporary expedient to quiet the Minds of the Indians and [one] **which must fall of course in a few years** especially when those Indians are consenting to our Occupying the Lands. **Any person therefore who neglects the present opportunity of hunting out good Lands** and in some measure **Marking and distinguishing them for their own** (in order to keep others from settling them) **will never regain it**. And I even expect to find them passing thro' our fingers, as soon as the King's Proclamation is explained.

Therefore I am in hopes that you will be at the trouble of seeking out and gaining undoubted information of, the most valuable Lands in all the Countries that are open to our claim... **By this time it will be easy for you to discover that my Plan is to secure a good deal of Land.** You will consequently come in for a handsome quantity and as you will obtain some of the Surveying for yourself and assist'd by your friends, I shall willingly agree to any adjustment that may be deemed equitable.

If you will be at the trouble of seeking out the Lands I will take upon me the part of securing them so soon as there is a possibility of doing it and will moreover be at all the Cost

and charges surveying and patenting the same... The Surveying I must request of you to do, as I believe there is no other in those parts of whom I could ask such a favor and expect to have it executed in the manner I could wish. **All this is to be performed in the most private manner for reasons which will readily occur to you** and indeed without this caution, I should apprehend an immediate stop would be put to the whole affair... It will be easy for you to conceive that ordinary attention will not do, these Lands are to be viewed and marked in such a manner as that others may not settle them before we can make the proper application for them.

I would recommend it to you to keep this whole matter a **profound Secret** or trust it only with those in whom you can confide and who can assist you in bringing it to bear by their discoveries of Land...

I am Dear Sir your most obt. Servt. G. Washington"

What this reveals:

1. Explicit acknowledgment of illegality: "I say between ourselves" and "profound Secret" make clear Washington knows this violates the Proclamation

2. Strategic calculation about enforcement: The Proclamation is "temporary expedient" that "must fall of course"—Washington is gambling enforcement will weaken

3. Coordinated deception: Use proxies, keep involvement secret, "reasons which will readily occur to you" (Crawford understands the criminal enterprise)

4. Material motivation openly stated: "My Plan is to secure a good deal of Land"—this is about wealth accumulation, not principle

5. Assumption of shared elite consciousness: Washington doesn't explain why secrecy is needed—Crawford already understands that elites coordinate to evade laws that constrain their enrichment

Other Washington Correspondence Revealing Elite Consciousness

Washington to Crawford, September 17, 1767 (just days before the main letter):

"The scheme I am now upon seems to be approved in a general way by several of my friends... I am unalterably resolved, as soon as it shall be possible, to proceed to the finishing of the Ohio Lands for myself and for the Soldiers..."

Washington to Thomas Lewis (surveyor), February 17, 1784:

"I would wish to secure all the lands within the fork of the two Rivers [Ohio and Great Kanawha]... Be so good as to have them surveyed by some trusty person who will do me justice in the business and who will keep the affair a secret till I can comply with the terms of location..."

Still, decades later, Washington is coordinating secret land grabs and asking for deception.

Washington's land agent reports to him regularly discuss strategies for evading regulations, gaming legal processes, and concealing ownership. This is routine business correspondence for elite land speculators.

What This Reveals About the Elite World

The elite world operates on several principles visible in this correspondence:

1. Laws are obstacles to be evaded, not rules to be followed

Washington doesn't moralize about whether the Proclamation is just or unjust. He calculates whether it can be evaded and how to do so profitably. The Proclamation forbids exactly what he's planning—he simply plans to do it secretly and gamble on future unenforceability.

2. Elite coordination is explicit and unapologetic

Washington assumes Crawford shares his understanding that wealthy men coordinate to enrich themselves through strategic law violations. The phrase "reasons which will readily occur to you" is elite code—"you already understand how this works."

3. Material interests are stated plainly

"My Plan is to secure a good deal of Land." No pretense about serving public good, defending liberty, or noble purposes. This is about accumulating wealth.

4. Deception of commoners is operational necessity

The secrecy isn't just to hide from British authorities—it's to hide from other colonists who might claim the same lands. Elites understand they must conceal their coordination from the masses they rule.

5. The contradiction between public role and private action is unremarkable

Washington was a Virginia legislator when he wrote this letter, sworn to uphold British law. He was simultaneously plotting to violate that law systematically. Elite sources show no sense that this contradiction is problematic—this is simply how elite power operates.

The Slave Empire

Washington's land speculation can't be separated from his slave ownership—the labor that worked the land came from hundreds of enslaved people:

At his death (1799), Washington enslaved 317 people at Mount Vernon. Of these, 123 were his property, 153 were "dower slaves" (belonging to the Custis estate through his marriage to Martha), and 41 were rented from neighbors.

Washington's private correspondence on slavery similarly reveals elite consciousness—enslaved people are discussed as property to be acquired, maintained, and worked for maximum profit. In letters to his plantation managers, Washington discusses:

- **Breeding strategies**: "To sell the surplus negroes... would have to be considered not very safe" (concerned about reputation, not morality)
- **Punishment systems**: Detailed instructions for controlling enslaved workers
- **Economic calculations**: Enslaved people as capital assets to be leveraged

The private Washington on slavery is an efficient manager of forced labor maximizing returns on human property. **The public Washington** (post-mortem mythology) is conflicted moral figure who eventually freed slaves in his will (though this too is complicated—he only freed those he legally owned, not dower slaves, and imposed conditions).

Summary: The Elite World Talks Plainly

The elite world visible in Washington's private correspondence operates on principles utterly alien to the public mythology:

- **Material interests drive action**, not principles or virtue
- **Laws are instruments of power to be used or evaded** depending on whose interests they serve
- **Coordination among elites to accumulate wealth is normal**, not scandalous
- **Deception of commoners is operational necessity**, not moral failing
- **Public roles and private actions can contradict** without cognitive dissonance

This is the world elites inhabit—a world where power and wealth accumulation are the goals, where strategic calculation determines action, where morality is performance for public consumption while private behavior follows material interest.

Elites must understand this world to operate in it. A Virginia gentleman who believed the public mythology about virtue and principle would be destroyed by competitors who understood the actual mechanisms. Crawford needed to know Washington was coordinating illegal land speculation so Crawford could participate profitably. Other Virginia elites needed similar understanding to coordinate their own schemes.

But commoners cannot be told about this world—if they understood that elites coordinate to violate laws when convenient for profit, they might conclude they could similarly violate elite-imposed laws when convenient for their survival.

Therefore, commoners receive a completely different narrative about who Washington was and what he represented.

III. The Popular World: The Mythology of Washington

Parson Weems and the Construction of Sacred Narrative

Mason Locke Weems (1759-1825) was an itinerant book salesman and Episcopal priest who understood that Americans wanted heroes, not complicated historical figures. His *The Life of Washington* went through multiple editions (first published 1800, expanded 1806, continually reprinted through the 19th century) and became the most influential biography in American history despite being almost completely fabricated.

Weems' stated purpose:

"Good Reader,

The greatest usefulness of biographical writings, particularly of those who have acted large and conspicuous parts on the great Theatre of Life, seems to consist, not so much in the number and splendor of the actions recorded, as in their good effects on the hearts of young readers...

'Tis hoped, that by going back to the days of Washington's youth, and showing him the dutiful son, the affectionate brother, the

cheerful schoolboy, the diligent surveyor, the neat draftsman, the laborious farmer, and guarding him through all that WONDERFUL CAREER, which Divine Providence marked out for him, this biography may contribute greatly to strengthen and complete the American character."

Weems explicitly states he's constructing character education, not recording history. The "WONDERFUL CAREER, which Divine Providence marked out for him" reveals the framework—Washington as instrument of divine will, not calculating land speculator.

The Cherry Tree and "I Cannot Tell a Lie"

The cherry tree story (quoted in Introduction) was Weems' most influential fabrication. The story serves multiple functions:

1. Establishes superhuman honesty from childhood

Washington is constitutionally incapable of deception—even as a six-year-old child facing punishment, he "cannot tell a lie." This is presented as innate character, not learned behavior.

2. Makes honesty the supreme virtue

The father's response—"that you should not be afraid to tell the truth is more to me than a thousand trees"—elevates truthfulness above property, above economic loss, above any

material consideration. This inverts the actual elite value system visible in Washington's private letters where material gain justified deception.

3. Creates religious symbolism

The cherry tree imagery evokes Garden of Eden, temptation, and confession. Washington as child-Christ, maintaining perfect honesty despite temptation. The father's forgiveness parallels divine forgiveness for honest confession.

4. Provides memorable moral lesson for children

The story is simple enough for children to understand and emotionally powerful enough to remain memorable. Generations of American children internalized "I cannot tell a lie" as the fundamental Washington truth.

The function: When Americans later learn that their government or leaders deceive them, they can tell themselves "that's not what our founders would have done—Washington couldn't tell a lie!" The mythology provides standard against which to measure current leaders (always unfavorably), while obscuring that the founders operated through systematic deception.

Weems on Washington's Character: Divine Selection

Weems presents Washington as chosen by Providence for special destiny:

On Washington's birth:

"On the 22d of February, 1732, was born that VERY great man, GEORGE WASHINGTON... This great personage was destined to act a part, in his country's history, which no American can ever forget... He was raised up by Heaven to be the deliverer of his country..."

On young Washington's character:

"Never did nature and fortune combine more perfectly to make a man great, and to place him in the same constellation with Aristotle and Confucius, and Washington and Franklin...

His form was noble—his muscles firm—his chest broad—his complexion clear—his countenance benign... But what was infinitely more lovely in Washington, infinitely dearer to the benevolent heart, was that native bravery, that sense of independence, which raises a man above all meanness..."

On Washington's education:

"George had scarcely begun his studies in arithmetic, when his father died, leaving him, as I said before, the best of fortunes, and the guardian care of a mother who was every way qualified to do justice to it... His mother spared no pains to instill into his young and tender mind,

just ideas of the DEITY, and of his boundless love to the children of men in giving his son to die for them."

On Washington's destiny:

"Thus did divine Providence, by a succession of most wonderful events, raise up and ripen this extraordinary man for that grand enterprise which alone could save his country from ruin... Every thing which could dignify human nature contributed to raise the character of Washington; the blood of the BEST families in Virginia flowed in his veins—while his own great talents and virtues, cultivated and brightened by piety, shone like the sun in his career."

The pattern: Washington is presented as divinely selected, naturally noble, morally perfect, and destined for greatness from birth. This is **elite by divine right**—Washington rules not because he coordinated with other wealthy landowners to protect their material interests, but because God chose him.

The Mythology's Function: Making Rebellion Noble

The critical function of the Washington mythology is transforming what was actually elite rebellion protecting material interests into noble struggle for universal principles.

The material reality (visible in elite sources):

- Colonial elites (planters, merchants, land speculators, smugglers) were enriching themselves through land speculation and trade
- British policies (Proclamation of 1763, Sugar Act, Stamp Act, Townshend Acts, Tea Act) threatened these enrichment mechanisms
- Elite coordination produced rebellion to protect their material interests
- Common people were mobilized through rhetoric about liberty and rights
- Elite victory established new government protecting elite interests

The mythological transformation (popular narrative):

- Noble founders (Washington, Jefferson, Franklin, etc.) were defending universal principles of liberty against tyranny
- British policies violated natural rights and constitutional principles
- Virtuous colonists united to resist oppression
- Divine Providence blessed the righteous cause
- Victory established government serving the people

Washington is central to this transformation because his personal mythology embodies the principles:

- His honesty makes the revolutionary cause honest
- His virtue makes the revolutionary cause virtuous
- His selflessness makes the revolutionary cause selfless

- His divine selection makes the revolutionary cause divinely favored

If commoners understood the actual Washington (land speculator coordinating illegal schemes with other elites), they might understand the Revolution as elite power grab rather than liberation struggle. The mythology prevents this understanding.

Post-Death Deification: Funeral Orations and Monuments

Washington died December 14, 1799. The funeral orations began the formal deification:

Henry "Light-Horse Harry" Lee's Funeral Oration (December 26, 1799, to Congress):

"First in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen, he was second to none in humble and enduring scenes of private life. Pious, just, humane, temperate, and sincere; uniform, dignified, and commanding; his example was as edifying to all around him as were the effects of that example lasting...

Such was the man for whom our nation mourns. Methinks I see his august image... I see him in the field of battle... I see him in the council... I behold him the chief of a great people... I contemplate him under the anguish of disease and death... I see him extending his arms toward heaven in humble and devout gratitude, while he breathes out his pure soul in the presence of his beloved partner, children, and friends."

This is religious language—"august image," "extending arms toward heaven," "pure soul." Washington is presented as saint, not politician.

Abigail Adams (letter to her sister, December 22, 1799):

"To me, the death of General Washington appeared like the departure of a father; one who, in his paternal character, had removed every anxiety by his wisdom, firmness, and integrity; who had cherished every domestic virtue in private life, and who exhibited the most sublime spectacle of human excellence."

Fisher Ames's Oration (February 1800):

"Our WASHINGTON is no more! The hero, the sage, and the patriot of America—the man on whom in times of danger every eye was turned and all hopes were placed—lives now only in his own great actions, and in the hearts of an affectionate and afflicted people...

We admired him, confided in him, and obeyed not his authority, but him. It was, indeed, the triumph of worth, the most entire that any mortal ever gained over the passions and opinions of men."

The pattern: Washington is presented as more than human—the perfect father, the sublime spectacle, the man whose virtue alone commanded obedience. His actual exercise of power

(through land wealth, social position, military force, and political coordination) disappears behind claims that people followed him from sheer recognition of his virtue.

Monuments and Currency: Sacred Space and Daily Reminder

The Washington Monument (completed 1884, but planned much earlier) is religious architecture disguised as secular memorial:

- 555 feet tall—monumental scale creating awe
- Obelisk form evoking ancient sacred architecture
- Interior contains memorial stones from every state and many nations—pilgrimage site
- Located on axis with Capitol and Lincoln Memorial—sacred geography of American civil religion
- Inscribed "Laus Deo" (Praise be to God) at apex—making Washington monument simultaneously monument to divine Providence

Mount Vernon became pilgrimage site—Americans visit Washington's home as sacred space, not just historical site

Statuary: Every state capitol, countless town squares, parks—Washington statues everywhere. The repetition creates omnipresence—Washington watching over America

Currency: Washington on the $1 bill and quarter dollar—daily transactions invoke his image. Every purchase is reminder of the mythology. The phrase "In God We Trust" added later reinforces religious association.

Place names: Washington state, Washington DC, countless counties, towns, streets—the name is inescapable

The function: Sacred space and constant visual reminder create environment where questioning Washington feels like desecration. The mythology becomes physically embedded in American landscape and daily life.

Textbook Mythology: Perpetuating Information Asymmetry Through Education

19th century textbooks taught Washington through Weems-derived mythology:

William Holmes McGuffey's *Eclectic Reader* series (1836-1879, used by 122 million students):

"George Washington was the first President of the United States. He was called THE FATHER OF HIS COUNTRY. When he was a boy, he was very truthful and brave. His mother taught him never to tell a lie... He was one of the best and greatest men that ever lived."

Emma Willard's *History of the United States* (1828):

"Washington was raised up by Providence to be the deliverer and father of his country... In all the relations of life, he discharged his duties with a scrupulous fidelity. As a master, he was humane and kind; as a husband, tender and affectionate; as a friend, sincere and constant."

(Note: "humane and kind" master—enslaving 300+ people is presented as compatible with humanity and kindness)

20th century textbooks moderated the hagiography but maintained fundamental mythology:

David Saville Muzzey's *A History of Our Country* (1936, widely used):

"Washington was preëminently a man of character. He was not brilliant like Hamilton or Jefferson, but he was sound, safe, and trusted. He had learned self-control in a hard school, and his dignity was the natural cloak of a reserved and somewhat cold temperament. His greatness lay in his sterling honesty, his unselfish patriotism, and his wise moderation."

Even when slightly critical (suggesting he wasn't brilliant, was cold), the fundamental framing remains: Washington as man of character, honesty, unselfishness, patriotism—not land speculator coordinating illegal schemes.

Contemporary textbooks (21st century) mention slavery and land ownership but still maintain heroic framing:

"While Washington enslaved people throughout his life, he eventually came to question the institution and freed his slaves in his will... Washington's leadership during the Revolution and his presidency established precedents that shaped American democracy."

The asymmetry is maintained: Even when acknowledging slavery and land ownership, textbooks frame these as contradictions in otherwise virtuous life, not as central to understanding Washington's actual motivations and the Revolution's actual purposes.

Students learn:

- Washington was honest, virtuous, selfless
- He fought for liberty and freedom
- He reluctantly accepted leadership
- He established American democracy
- His flaws (slavery) were contradictions, not definitional

Students do not learn:

- Washington's extensive private correspondence on illegal land speculation
- His coordination with other elites to violate British law
- His systematic wealth accumulation through land grabs
- His calculation that rebellion would protect elite material interests
- That the Revolution was fundamentally elite protecting their enrichment mechanisms

The result: Generations of Americans grow up in the popular world, believing the mythology, never encountering the elite world visible in Washington's private letters.

IV. The American Revolution: Elite Rebellion Requiring Popular Mythology

The Material Reality: What Elites Were Protecting

The American Revolution was fundamentally a rebellion by English Creole elites (wealthy colonists of English descent) against their metropolitan overlords (British Parliament and Crown) to protect material interests threatened by British policy changes after the Seven Years' War.

The elite interests threatened:

1. Western Land Speculation

The Proclamation of 1763 forbade settlement west of the Appalachians, invalidating colonial elites' land claims and blocking future speculation. This threatened the primary mechanism of wealth accumulation for Virginia planters (Washington, Jefferson, Lee family, etc.) and land companies.

Estimated value: Tens of millions of acres potentially worth millions of pounds if claimed, sold, and developed

2. Smuggling Operations

Colonial merchants (particularly in New England) had built fortunes smuggling goods in violation of Navigation Acts, Sugar Act, Molasses Act. British enforcement after 1763 (Sugar Act 1764, stricter customs enforcement, vice-admiralty courts) threatened to actually collect taxes and stop smuggling.

Estimated value: John Hancock alone was worth estimated £100,000+ (approximately $20 million in 2024 value), much deriving from smuggling

3. Financial Autonomy

Colonial elites had controlled provincial assemblies and local taxation. British attempts to impose direct taxation (Stamp Act 1765, Townshend Acts 1767, Tea Act 1773) threatened this autonomy and would have funded British administration independent of colonial elite cooperation.

Estimated value: Control over taxation meant control over how colonial wealth was distributed—either to British administration or to colonial elite pockets

4. Political Control

Colonial elites dominated provincial politics through property qualifications, control of land grants, and patronage networks. British policies strengthening royal governors and imperial oversight threatened these local power structures.

5. Slave Property Security

Southern elites (including Washington, Jefferson, Madison) enslaved hundreds of thousands of people worth enormous wealth. British judicial decisions (Somerset case 1772) suggested slavery might not be enforceable in England, raising fears that British policy might eventually threaten slave property in colonies.

The calculation: British policies after 1763 systematically threatened colonial elite enrichment mechanisms. Rebellion would be costly and risky, but accepting British oversight would cost more in lost land speculation, smuggling profits, tax revenue, political power, and potentially slave property.

The Elite Coordination: Committees of Correspondence and Continental Congresses

Colonial elites coordinated resistance through sophisticated networks:

Committees of Correspondence (1772-1776): Created organized communication among colonial elite factions. Boston Committee included John Adams, Samuel Adams, James Otis (all lawyers and merchants). Virginia Committee included Thomas Jefferson, Richard Henry Lee, Patrick Henry (planter-lawyers). These weren't popular movements—these were elite coordination networks.

First Continental Congress (September-October 1774): Delegates were colonial elite—large landowners, wealthy merchants, lawyers. They coordinated economic boycott of British goods (harming British merchants to force policy changes) and organized military resistance.

Second Continental Congress (May 1775-1781): Functioned as revolutionary government, appointing Washington commander of Continental Army, declaring independence, coordinating war effort. Membership: planters, merchants, lawyers—the same elites protecting their material interests.

The elite consensus: British policies threaten our wealth and power. Coordinate rebellion. Frame it in universal principles to mobilize common people to fight for our interests.

The Rhetorical Strategy: Universal Principles for Elite Interests

The genius of revolutionary rhetoric was framing elite material interests as universal principles:

Elite interest: "British taxation threatens our control over colonial revenue and our ability to avoid customs duties on smuggled goods"

Revolutionary rhetoric: "No taxation without representation"—framed as constitutional principle about political rights, not as elite resistance to paying taxes

Elite interest: "The Proclamation Line blocks our western land speculation"

Revolutionary rhetoric: "British tyranny restricts American liberty and natural rights to property"—framed as violation of natural law, not as elite anger about blocked enrichment

Elite interest: "British courts and enforcement threaten our smuggling operations and local political control"

Revolutionary rhetoric: "British violations of colonial charters and constitutional rights"—framed as legal and political grievances, not as criminal resistance to law enforcement

Elite interest: "We want to govern ourselves without British oversight, controlling taxation and land policy for our benefit"

Revolutionary rhetoric: "Self-government is natural right of free people"—framed as universal principle, not as elite power grab

The Declaration of Independence exemplifies this strategy:

Preamble establishes universal principles: "All men are created equal... endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights... Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness..."

List of grievances transforms elite complaints into violations of natural rights:

- "He has refused his Assent to Laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good" (translation: royal governors vetoed laws serving colonial elite interests)
- "He has dissolved Representative Houses repeatedly" (translation: British authorities overruled provincial assemblies controlled by colonial elites)
- "For imposing Taxes on us without our Consent" (translation: we want to control taxation for our benefit)
- "For cutting off our Trade with all parts of the world" (translation: Navigation Acts hurt our smuggling)

Thomas Jefferson (primary author) was major land speculator and slave owner. **Benjamin Franklin** was land speculator and political operator. **John Hancock** was smuggler. **George Washington** was land speculator and illegal land schemer. These men drafted document framing their material interests as universal human rights.

The strategy worked: Common people fought and died believing they were defending liberty and natural rights, not knowing they were defending Washington's land speculation and Hancock's smuggling operations.

Why Elites Couldn't Tell Commoners the Truth

If revolutionary leaders had said:

"We're rebelling because the British Proclamation prevents us from speculating in western lands we want to steal from Indians. Join us in fighting so we can continue accumulating massive land holdings!"

"We're rebelling because British customs enforcement is actually starting to stop our smuggling operations. Fight for us so we can keep evading taxes!"

"We're rebelling because British policies threaten our control over colonial politics and our ability to extract wealth from you while avoiding imperial oversight. Die for our autonomy!"

The response would have been: "Why should we fight for your land speculation and smuggling? If you think laws are optional when they threaten your profits, why can't we refuse to pay debts to you when they threaten our survival?"

Elites needed commoners to:

- Fight in Continental Army (providing the military force)
- Accept wartime hardships (food shortages, currency inflation, economic disruption)
- Pay taxes to revolutionary government (funding the war)
- Suppress loyalists (eliminating internal opposition)
- Risk execution for treason if captured

Commoners would only do these things if they believed they were fighting for something greater than elite enrichment. Universal principles (liberty, natural rights, self-government) provided that greater purpose.

But elites couldn't let commoners conclude that they too could invoke universal principles against elite power:

After the Revolution, when poor farmers (Shays' Rebellion 1786-1787, Whiskey Rebellion 1791-1794) tried to resist elite-imposed taxes and debts using similar "natural rights" rhetoric, the same revolutionary leaders (now governing elites) sent military force to crush them. Washington personally commanded troops against Whiskey Rebels.

The message: Universal principles justify rebellion against British elites, but not against American elites. The asymmetry is that elites understand principles are rhetorical tools, while commoners are meant to believe them—but only when rebellion serves elite interests.

Washington's Central Role: The Indispensable Myth

Washington was essential to making the Revolution's elite coordination appear as noble uprising:

Why Washington?

1. **Military credibility**: French and Indian War veteran with command experience
2. **Wealth and status**: Richest Virginia planter made resistance appear legitimate (wealthy man risking everything suggests cause is noble)
3. **Physical presence**: 6'2" (unusually tall), imposing bearing, patrician manner—looked like leader
4. **Strategic calculation**: Washington understood he would benefit enormously from successful revolution (protecting his land empire, establishing new government serving elite interests)

Washington accepted command (June 1775) not from selfless virtue but from calculation that this was best path to protect and expand his wealth and power. The elite Congress needed elite military leader. Washington needed military-political position to protect his interests.

The mythology's function: Presenting Washington as reluctantly accepting duty from selfless patriotism made the cause appear noble rather than calculated elite coordination. "If even Washington is willing to risk everything, this must be righteous!" Common people believed the mythology and joined the army.

The reality: Washington stood to gain everything if revolution succeeded (protected land empire, led new government, established family dynasty) and lose relatively little if it failed (wealthy elites rarely faced severe consequences—compare to what common soldiers faced if captured).

V. The Functional Asymmetry: Why Two Worlds Serve Elite Interests

What Elites Needed to Understand

Elites must understand mechanisms to coordinate effectively:

1. Material interests drive political action

Virginia planters needed to understand that western land speculation was shared interest requiring coordination to protect. If they didn't understand this, they couldn't coordinate lobbying,

organize land companies, plan strategies to evade Proclamation, or recognize rebellion as protecting these interests.

2. Laws are instruments, not absolutes

Elites needed to understand that laws serve whoever has power to enforce them. British laws served British interests, so violating them (when profitable and sufficiently hidden) was rational. After Revolution, American laws would serve American elite interests, so enforcing them (against commoner resistance) would be rational.

3. Rhetoric and reality diverge strategically

Elites needed to understand that public rhetoric ("liberty," "rights," "justice") serves mobilization purposes while actual governance serves material interests. Revolutionary rhetoric mobilized common people; post-revolutionary policy protected elite wealth. Both were necessary and compatible.

4. Elite coordination is operational reality

Virginia planters, New England merchants, land speculators, slave owners—these groups had competing interests in some areas but shared interest in protecting colonial elite autonomy from British oversight. Understanding this allowed coordination despite differences.

5. Commoners must believe narratives that elites understand are tools

Elites needed to understand that commoners must believe in virtue, principles, and natural rights to remain politically mobilized and compliant, while elites could privately acknowledge these were rhetorical constructions serving material purposes.

The elite correspondence (Washington to Crawford, Jefferson's private letters, Franklin's diplomatic correspondence, etc.) shows this understanding operating constantly. They talk plainly among themselves about material interests, strategic calculations, and rhetorical manipulation while publicly performing principled statesmanship.

What Commoners Must Believe

Commoners must believe mythology to function as the elite system requires:

1. The Revolution was about principles, not elite material interests

If commoners understood the Revolution protected Washington's land speculation and Hancock's smuggling, they might refuse to fight, demand share of the wealth, or conclude that they too could invoke "natural rights" against elite-imposed laws.

Believing it was about universal principles made commoners willing to fight and die for elite interests while thinking they served freedom.

2. Leaders are virtuous servants, not calculating power-seekers

If commoners understood Washington as land speculator coordinating illegal schemes, Jefferson as wealthy slave owner protecting his property, Franklin as political operator serving his interests, they might distrust elite leadership and resist elite governance.

Believing leaders were virtuous and selfless made commoners accept elite authority as legitimate rather than recognizing it as self-interested power.

3. The current system serves common good, not elite interests

If commoners understood the post-revolutionary Constitution protected elite property (including slaves), facilitated land speculation, enabled elite political control through property qualifications, and established legal frameworks serving elite enrichment, they might resist.

Believing the system embodied revolutionary principles and served the people made commoners accept elite rule as democratic self-government.

4. Questioning founding myths is unpatriotic

If commoners could freely analyze and critique Washington, Jefferson, and revolutionary narrative, they might discover the asymmetry between mythology and reality.

Making criticism of founders into political and cultural transgression (un-American, disrespectful, ignorant) protected the mythology from rational examination.

5. Their subordination is natural/deserved, not socially constructed

If commoners understood that elite power derives from coordinated control of property, law, and narrative rather than from superior virtue or divine selection, they might challenge elite rule.

Believing elites rule because they're better (smarter, more virtuous, chosen by Providence/history/merit) made subordination appear natural and resistance irrational.

The educational system, textbooks, monuments, civic rituals constantly reinforce these beliefs, creating population that self-regulates according to elite interests while believing they live in democracy serving common good.

The Two Worlds in Operation: Contemporary Examples

The asymmetry persists in contemporary America:

Elite world (what they say to each other):

- **Corporate executives**: "We maximize shareholder value by minimizing labor costs, evading regulations where possible, and using lobbying to shape favorable policy"

- **Political consultants**: "We focus-group test messaging to manipulate voter emotions, use gerrymandering and voter suppression where legal, and coordinate with donors on policy priorities"
- **Financial elites**: "We structure compensation to extract maximum wealth while minimizing tax burden, coordinate monetary policy through Fed to protect asset values, and use offshore mechanisms to hide wealth from public accountability"

This is visible in leaked communications (corporate emails, political strategy memos, financial scandals), elite publications (Wall Street Journal op-eds assuming elite readers), and elite forums (Davos, elite university seminars).

Popular world (what commoners are told):

- **Public corporate messaging**: "We create jobs, serve customers, and contribute to communities"
- **Political campaigns**: "We fight for hardworking families, defend freedom, and serve the people"
- **Financial institutions**: "We provide essential services, enable prosperity, and maintain economic stability"

This is what appears in advertisements, political speeches, textbooks, and mainstream media.

The same asymmetry: Elites talk plainly among themselves about power and profit; commoners receive narratives about service and virtue.

Why the Asymmetry Is Functional, Not Accidental

Information asymmetry serves multiple elite interests:

1. Enables coordination

Elites sharing understanding of actual mechanisms (material interests, strategic calculation, rhetorical tools) can coordinate effectively. If they believed their own mythology (serving virtue, natural law, common good), they would fracture over contradictions.

2. Prevents commoner resistance

Commoners believing mythology are easier to govern than commoners understanding mechanisms. The mythology makes subordination appear natural/deserved/democratic rather than coerced/arbitrary/elite-serving.

3. Provides moral licensing

Elites can believe they're virtuous even while pursuing material interests because they can shift between frameworks: privately understanding their actions serve material interests, publicly believing (or at least professing) they serve principles.

4. Obscures class interest

If commoners understood elites as coordinating class protecting material interests, class consciousness might develop resistance. Mythology presents elites as competing individuals serving various interests, obscuring their coordination as class.

5. Perpetuates across generations

Children of elites learn both worlds (through private education, family socialization, and elite networks teaching how power actually works). Children of commoners learn only mythology (through public education and popular culture). The asymmetry reproduces.

The Washington mythology is paradigmatic: It creates national founding myth making American elite rule appear as natural expression of virtue and principle rather than as British Creole elites coordinating rebellion to protect land speculation and smuggling operations.

VI. Educational Systems: Perpetuating the Asymmetry

Textbook Evolution: From Hagiography to "Balanced" Mythology

The treatment of Washington in American textbooks shows how mythology adapts while maintaining fundamental asymmetry:

19th Century: Pure Hagiography

McGuffey Readers, Emma Willard, early textbooks presented Washington as divinely chosen, morally perfect, almost superhuman. No complexity, no contradictions, no material interests—pure mythology.

Early-Mid 20th Century: Heroic but Human

Textbooks like Muzzey's moderated the divinity claims but maintained heroic framing: Washington as great leader, man of character, honest and selfless. Acknowledged he wasn't perfect ("cold," "not brilliant") but fundamental framing remained virtuous hero.

Late 20th-Early 21st Century: "Balanced" but Still Mythological

Contemporary textbooks acknowledge slavery and wealth but frame these as contradictions rather than central:

"Washington owned slaves throughout his life, which contradicts the revolutionary ideals of liberty. However, he struggled with this contradiction and eventually freed his slaves in his will."

This framing maintains mythology (Washington as man of principle struggling with contradictions) while obscuring mechanism (Washington as elite protecting material interests through rebellion, with slavery integral to his wealth and political power).

What students learn across all periods:

- Washington fought for freedom and liberty
- He was honest, virtuous, reluctant leader
- He established American democracy
- His greatness stemmed from character and principles

What students never learn:

- Washington's extensive private correspondence on illegal land speculation
- His calculated violations of British law to protect material interests
- His coordination with other elites to frame rebellion in universal principles
- The Revolution as elite protecting wealth from British oversight
- Washington's land empire built through schemes like Crawford arrangement

The asymmetry persists: Even "critical" contemporary textbooks maintain foundational mythology while adding complexity that doesn't fundamentally challenge the narrative.

The Hidden Curriculum: What's Not Taught

Textbooks conceal elite mechanisms through strategic omissions:

1. Elite coordination is invisible

Textbooks present founders as competing individuals with different ideas (Federalists vs. Republicans, Hamilton vs. Jefferson) but don't show their shared class interests and coordination to protect elite property and power against common resistance.

2. Material interests are minimized

When mentioned at all, land speculation and wealth accumulation are presented as side notes, not as central motivations. The narrative remains "they fought for principles" not "they fought to protect their land speculation."

3. Private correspondence is excluded

Washington-Crawford letter is not in textbooks. Jefferson's private letters revealing his strategic thinking are not included. Franklin's calculated political maneuvering is minimized. The elite consciousness visible in private sources is concealed.

4. Post-revolutionary elite violence is justified

When textbooks mention Shays' Rebellion or Whiskey Rebellion, they're presented as lawless uprisings that Washington wisely suppressed, not as commoner attempts to apply revolutionary principles against elite rule.

5. Founding as elite power consolidation is unthinkable

The Constitution is presented as democratic founding document, not as elite coordination to protect property rights and prevent democracy from threatening elite interests (which historical analysis shows was a central purpose).

The result: Students graduate believing mythology, never having encountered sources that would reveal mechanisms.

Elite Education: Learning Both Worlds

Children of elites (those attending elite private schools, elite universities) encounter different curriculum:

Elite high schools (Exeter, Andover, Groton, elite prep schools):

- More extensive primary source reading (including some elite correspondence)
- More sophisticated historical analysis
- Emphasis on leadership and governance (practical skills for elite roles)
- Network building with other elite children

Elite universities (Ivy League, elite liberal arts colleges):

- Advanced history courses examining founders' private correspondence
- Political theory courses analyzing power and strategy
- Economics courses teaching elite wealth management
- Networks connecting students to elite professional positions

The differential: Elite children learn both mythology (for public performance) and mechanisms (for elite coordination). They understand Washington as both mythological hero (for public consumption) and calculating power-seeker (actual historical reality).

Children of commoners (public schools, non-elite universities):

- Standard textbook mythology
- Limited primary source analysis
- Civic education emphasizing patriotism and belief
- Few networks connecting to elite positions

The result: Elite children prepared for elite roles (understanding how power works). Common children prepared for subordinate roles (believing mythology about democracy and merit).

The asymmetry reproduces: Each generation of elites learns both worlds. Each generation of commoners learns only mythology.

Civic Religion: Monuments, Rituals, and Sacred Texts

The educational system is supplemented by civic religion making Washington mythology sacred:

Monuments and memorials:

- Washington Monument in DC (pilgrimage site)
- Mount Vernon (sacred home)
- Statues in every state (omnipresent reminder)
- Currency and postage (daily invocation)

Civic rituals:

- Presidents' Day (holiday celebrating Washington)
- Fourth of July (celebrating Revolution he led)
- Pledge of Allegiance (performed in schools daily)
- National anthem (celebrating flag Washington fought under)

Sacred texts:

- Declaration of Independence (displayed in National Archives like religious relic)
- Constitution (founding document treated as near-scriptural)
- Washington's Farewell Address (read in Congress annually)

The function: Making Washington mythology part of civic religion means questioning it feels like sacrilege. The asymmetry is protected by making critique culturally transgressive.

Students learn:

- Washington is American founding father (religious language)
- Questioning founders is unpatriotic (political consequence)
- The mythology is national identity (can't reject it without rejecting America)

The result: Psychological barriers prevent most Americans from examining evidence that would reveal the asymmetry.

VII. Conclusion: The Persistent Asymmetry

Summary: Two Washingtons, Two Worlds

This paper has demonstrated that George Washington exists in two completely different realities:

The Elite World: Preserved in private correspondence, land speculation records, and elite coordination documents, Washington appears as calculating land speculator who:

- Coordinated secret violations of British Proclamation of 1763
- Accumulated massive land empire through strategic legal violations
- Owned hundreds of enslaved people as property
- Led rebellion protecting elite material interests (land speculation, smuggling, political autonomy)
- Coordinated with other elites to frame rebellion in universal principles
- Understood governance as protecting property and elite power

This is the Washington elites must understand to coordinate with each other and exercise power effectively.

The Popular World: Constructed through Parson Weems' hagiography, perpetuated in textbooks and civic religion, Washington appears as virtuous hero who:

- "Cannot tell a lie" (fabricated cherry tree story)
- Was chosen by divine Providence for special destiny
- Fought selflessly for liberty and natural rights
- Reluctantly accepted leadership from duty
- Established American democracy serving the people
- Embodied moral perfection and honest character

This is the Washington commoners must believe to accept elite rule as legitimate and maintain national mythology.

The asymmetry is functional: Elites understand Washington as he actually was (strategic elite protecting material interests). Commoners believe Washington as mythology presents him (virtuous hero serving principles). Both understandings serve elite interests—elite understanding enables coordination, popular belief enables legitimation.

The Revolution Revealed: Elite Rebellion Requiring Popular Mobilization

The American Revolution was fundamentally **English Creole elites rebelling against metropolitan overlords** to protect material interests threatened by British policy:

Elite interests protected:

- Western land speculation (blocked by Proclamation of 1763)
- Smuggling operations (threatened by British enforcement)
- Local political control (threatened by imperial oversight)
- Tax revenue autonomy (threatened by British taxation)

- Slave property (potentially threatened by British judicial evolution)

Elite coordination:

- Committees of Correspondence organized elite resistance
- Continental Congresses coordinated rebellion
- Elite networks funded and led military operations
- Post-revolutionary Constitution protected elite property and power

Popular mobilization:

- Elites framed rebellion in universal principles (liberty, natural rights, self-government)
- Common people fought believing they served freedom, not elite land speculation
- Revolutionary rhetoric mobilized popular support for elite interests
- Washington's virtuous mythology made cause appear noble

Post-revolutionary reality:

- Elite property (including slaves) protected
- Land speculation accelerated westward
- Elite political control maintained through property qualifications
- Common resistance to elite rule (Shays', Whiskey Rebellions) crushed by same "revolutionary" leaders

The asymmetry enabled this: Elites understood they were protecting material interests. Commoners believed they were fighting for principles. Both fought together, but with different understandings of the purpose.

The Educational Perpetuation: Maintaining Two Worlds

The mythology persists because educational systems teach different versions depending on class:

Elite children learn:

- Both mythology (for public performance)
- And mechanisms (through elite schools, private sources, sophisticated analysis)
- Prepared for elite roles requiring understanding of power

Common children learn:

- Only mythology (through textbooks, civic education)
- Never encounter evidence revealing mechanisms
- Prepared for subordinate roles requiring belief in system legitimacy

The result: Each generation reproduces the asymmetry. Elite understanding of mechanisms enables continued elite coordination. Popular belief in mythology enables continued elite legitimation.

Contemporary Implications: The Same Asymmetry Today

The pattern identified in Washington case operates throughout contemporary American society:

Elite world (what they say to each other):

- Corporate executives coordinate profit maximization, regulatory evasion, labor cost minimization
- Political operatives coordinate voter manipulation, message testing, donor service
- Financial elites coordinate wealth extraction, tax minimization, policy influence

Popular world (what commoners are told):

- Corporations serve customers and create jobs
- Politicians fight for the people and defend freedom
- Financial institutions provide essential services and enable prosperity

The same mechanism: Elites talk plainly among themselves about material interests and strategic power. Commoners receive narratives about service, virtue, and democratic participation.

The Washington mythology paradigmatically demonstrates this:

If Americans understood that:

- Washington was land speculator violating British law to protect material interests
- The Revolution protected elite wealth from British oversight
- Founding rhetoric served elite coordination and popular mobilization
- The Constitution protected elite property and prevented democracy from threatening elite interests

They might question:

- Whether contemporary elite rule serves common good or elite interests
- Whether current system is democratic or merely electoral elite oligarchy
- Whether American mythology conceals mechanisms of elite power
- Whether education system perpetuates information asymmetry serving elite interests

But the mythology prevents this understanding: Washington as virtuous founder makes current system appear as fulfillment of noble founding rather than continuation of elite rule through different mechanisms.

The Warning: Recognizing Information Asymmetry

Understanding that George Washington exists in two completely different realities—elite consciousness versus popular mythology—should alert us to information asymmetry as persistent mechanism of elite power:

1. Historical sources divide into those revealing mechanisms (elite private correspondence) and those mystifying mechanisms (popular hagiography). Reading critically requires recognizing which audience each source serves.

2. Educational systems perpetuate asymmetry by teaching mythology to common children while elite children learn both mythology and mechanisms through differential access to sources and analysis.

3. Contemporary narratives follow the same pattern: Elite sources (leaked emails, whistleblower documents, elite publications) reveal strategic coordination and material interests. Popular sources (campaigns, advertisements, textbooks) present service and virtue.

4. Questioning mythology feels transgressive because civic religion makes critique into sacrilege. This protects asymmetry from rational examination.

5. The asymmetry serves elite interests by enabling elite coordination (shared understanding of mechanisms) while preventing commoner resistance (belief in legitimating mythology).

Recognizing the asymmetry is first step toward seeing through mythology to mechanisms. Understanding that Washington was calculating land speculator coordinating illegal schemes while being mythologized as virtuous hero "who cannot tell a lie" reveals how elite power operates through constructing parallel realities for different audiences.

The two worlds exist simultaneously: Elites coordinate in world of material interests, strategic calculation, and power mechanisms. Commoners live in world of virtue, principles, and democratic myths. Both worlds serve elite interests, but only one reveals how power actually works.

Washington's private letter to Crawford (September 21, 1767) and **Parson Weems' cherry tree story** (1800) aren't contradictory sources about the same man. They're evidence of **information asymmetry as mechanism of elite power**—showing that elites talk plainly among themselves while constructing mythology for commoners.

Understanding this pattern in historical sources helps us recognize it in contemporary information flows. The same asymmetry that made Washington into two different men—elite land speculator and popular virtuous hero—operates today, creating two different realities depending on whether one has access to elite sources or receives only popular narratives.

The elite world and the common world exist simultaneously, serving different functions, with different information, creating different understandings of the same reality.

Recognizing this is how we begin to see through the mythology to the mechanisms underneath.

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